



Volunteering Policy

Policy name	Volunteering Policy
Policy summary	Our policy to ensure a good practice framework for the involvement of volunteers in the life and work of the organisation.
Policy owner/ Responsible Director	Gavin Atkins – Executive Director of Services and Support Emily Perriam – Head of Volunteering and Community Networks
Policy Lead	Annabel Theaker – Performance and Policy Manager
Audience	All staff and volunteers
Key Consultation:	<i>EEDI Lead</i> <i>HR Lead</i> <i>Safeguarding Lead</i> <i>Volunteer Operations Manager</i> <i>Volunteers/Volunteer Managers</i> <i>People Activity Group</i>
Approver	Executive Group
Approval/effective date	October 2025
Approval Cycle	3 years
Next approval	2028

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Volunteers are part of a powerful community and make an incredible difference to the lives of people affected by MS and are crucial in helping us work towards our vision of a world free from the effects of MS.
- 1.2 The purpose of this policy is to provide a good practice framework for the involvement of volunteers in the life and work of the organisation. It outlines the volunteer management standards we are committed to achieving and maintaining and ensures that volunteers understand the standards that they can expect while at the MS Society.

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1.3 There are several ways people can volunteer with the MS Society, and roles can be:

- For one off events such as cheering at the marathon
- For time limited projects
- Longer term opportunities such as those at local groups

1.4 All areas of the organisation must refer to this policy prior to engaging any volunteers.

1.5 **Definitions**

1.6 **Volunteering:** At the MS Society, volunteering is the act of freely choosing to contribute time, skills, and effort to support the mission of MS Society without expectation of financial gain. It encompasses a wide range of activities, from direct service and raising funds to participation in governance and community-building efforts. It is rooted in mutual respect, inclusivity, and the shared goal of improving the lives of those affected by MS.

1.7 **Volunteer:** An MS Society volunteer is someone who freely gives their time, skills, or energy to support the mission of the MS Society, without being paid. They do this with the intention of contributing to the well-being of people affected by MS and the wider community.

1.8 **Volunteer Journey:** The Volunteer Journey outlines stages of volunteering involvement with MS Society, including phases such as recruitment, onboarding, learning and development, ongoing support/supervision, recognition, and exit. We have specific policies and procedures that set out best practice of volunteer management at each of those stages

1.9 **Volunteer Managers:** We recognise all staff, and in some cases other volunteers, who involve volunteers, make decisions or facilitate processes which will affect volunteers or support them at one or more stages of the volunteer journey as 'Volunteer Managers'. We expect everyone carrying out one of these tasks to adhere to good practice in volunteer management policies and procedures, which the Volunteering team will support and are outlined in this document.

2 **Policy statement**

2.1 The MS Society is committed to providing the best possible support to people living with MS and volunteering is one way in which we can achieve this. The aim of this policy is to ensure that the MS Society

takes a consistent approach to its work with volunteers and that they are fully supported during their volunteering role.

Purpose and aims

2.2 The MS Society acknowledges the significant role that volunteers play both in supporting service delivery, raising awareness and funds and in other ways across the organisation. The MS Society is committed to ensuring that consistent standards are applied to volunteering opportunities and will:

- Meet good practice standards across all our volunteering policies and processes
- Define and agree the scope of the roles undertaken by volunteers
- Respect the freedom of choice of volunteers about when they engage in volunteering activities
- Ensure that there is open and fair access to volunteering opportunities and that a consistent framework is utilised for the recruitment of volunteers
- Provide consistent terms of engagement for volunteers across all areas of the organisation
- Ensure the safety of volunteers and those they encounter within the course of their role
- Support volunteers to develop their own skills and knowledge
- Ensure everyone who involves volunteers is enabled to feel confident in doing so
- Provide reasonable adjustments and support volunteers need to carry out their role

Scope

2.3 This framework applies to volunteers engaged in supporting the delivery of the MS Society's services, offers and projects. It doesn't apply to services delivered by external paid providers, including contractors and alternate service delivery organisations where separate arrangements will apply.

2.4 It's important to recognise where volunteering is different from user involvement – user involvement being the act of making sure the voices of people with or affected by MS are heard and that they actively shape and improve the health and care services they use. Volunteers may take part in user involvement activities, but this will be in addition to their role and not a volunteering role in itself.

2.5 **Standards**

2.6 **Offering roles**

Roles will be created to be accessible, flexible, impactful and fulfilling for volunteers, and that fit with volunteers' lives.

Every volunteer role must have a signed off role description outlining what the role involves, any skills or experience required, benefits volunteers will receive and our mutual commitments.

Opportunities will be advertised widely to ensure that as many people as possible have the chance to get involved.

2.7 **Risk assessing roles**

All volunteer activities and tasks will be risk-assessed, and safe systems of work developed, in conjunction with the relevant operational manager where required.

This documentation is to be reviewed no less than every three years or when there are any significant changes in the processes or risk.

Volunteers must be adequately recruited, including relevant checks, and trained to be able them to carry out the role required. The exact nature of these things will depend on the role and the findings from the required risk assessment.

2.8 **Recruitment**

We are committed to a fair, accessible and inclusive recruitment process that supports volunteers to easily find a role that is right for them and supports our work and aims. This will include:

- Providing clear role descriptions that outline what the role involves, any skills or experience required and our mutual commitments.
- Completion of a Volunteer Application Form

And may include:

- A virtual, face-to-face, or telephone interview
- A trial period or training day to help the volunteer, and the recruiter, to make a final decision as to whether the role is right for the person applying.
- Relevant reference and disclosure checks

2.8.1 Where disclosure checks are required, volunteers cannot start their role until these are complete.

2.8.2 We will also ask potential volunteers with unspent convictions to declare these. This won't necessarily impact their ability to get the role and a decision will be made by the Head of Volunteering and Community Networks and the Safeguarding Lead about the suitability of the applicant for the role.

2.9 **Equality**

Volunteering opportunities are open to all from the age of 18, providing equal opportunities regardless of an individual's personal characteristics. (Children under 18 may join their parents or guardians to volunteer at events but will be the responsibility of their parent or guardian and not recorded as volunteers themselves.)

Selection will be based on the ability to undertake the voluntary role.

The MS Society is committed to:

- the principles of equity, equality, diversity and inclusion; providing equal opportunities for all and not discriminating against anyone on the grounds of their personal characteristics.
- celebrating differences, acting with fairness and honesty, and valuing all contributions from all people.
- making reasonable adjustments to the way we do things to accommodate volunteers with specific needs, where it is reasonably possible to do so.

Every potential volunteer is required to complete an equal opportunities form. We're committed to building a more diverse and inclusive volunteering experience. By having volunteers' equal opportunities information, we can make sure we understand who are volunteers are and that we're living up to our commitments in our Equity, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy.

2.10 **Safeguarding**

At the MS Society, we can work with adults at risk and so safeguarding is an essential part of what we do. Safeguarding adults means protecting an adult's right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect, and understanding what we need to do if we're worried about the safety or wellbeing of someone.

Any concerns that are raised by volunteers in relation to Safeguarding, should be raised through the MS Society's normal safeguarding referral process, as per our Safeguarding Policy.

2.11 **Welcome and induction**

We want to ensure all our volunteers are happy and confident to carry out their role. All volunteers will have a welcome and induction that will:

- Be proportionate to the time commitment, complexity and skills required in their role
- Act as an agreement with the volunteer about their role and responsibility, including support they will receive and any boundaries, as well as what they can expect from the MS Society
- Help them to understand how their volunteering fits into our wider work
- Give them the information they need to feel fully prepared for their role
- Detail where and how they can access the MS Society's policies and procedures that apply to their volunteering role.
- Discuss any additional support or adjustments required to help volunteers in their role?

2.12 **Learning and development**

We will ensure that all volunteers are provided with appropriate training, guidance and support so that they can:

- perform their role to their best ability
- feel happy and confident in their role
- develop their own skills and knowledge
- keep themselves and others safe
- comply with any legal responsibilities and/or best practice

If a volunteer is unable to complete any mandatory training, we will support them to change their volunteering role to a role that doesn't require this training, if they want to continue volunteering.

Volunteers won't be able to start their role until they have completed any required mandatory training.

2.13 **Ongoing support**

All volunteers will have a Volunteer Manager with responsibility for agreeing the scope of their role, providing an introduction/pre-assignment briefing and appropriate ongoing support. The designated Volunteer Manager will be their main point of contact at the MS Society and will ensure there is a chance to regularly meet with volunteers.

Anyone who involves volunteers will be appropriately trained and supported and will need to have completed a Volunteer Management induction before creating and recruiting roles.

We'll ensure that volunteers are aware of, and operate within, the scope of relevant MS Society policies and procedures and will resolve any issues that arise during the volunteering relationship.

It's the responsibility of the Volunteer Manager to maintain up to date, secure records of all its volunteers in line with the General Data Protection Regulations and in line with the Charity's guidance for Assemble.

We're committed to providing every volunteer with continued support during their time with us so that they feel engaged and part of the MS Society. This may involve opportunities for peer learning and networking.

We'll continue to recognise any additional challenges volunteers face and support reasonable adjustments volunteers might need to ensure their experience is a positive one.

2.14 **Communications**

Effective communication with volunteers is vital to the success of volunteer involvement.

All communications with volunteers should encourage a culture of open dialogue and the sharing of information and ideas between volunteers, staff and people affected by MS.

Volunteers will be kept up-to-date with any information relevant to their role by their Volunteer Manager. Important organisational developments and issues are communicated through a range of communication tools including publications, events, email updates and our website.

The MS Society is committed to ensuring that all volunteers can, and are encouraged to, feed in any ideas and suggestions in relation to their role or the work of the organisation. We're also committed to ensuring that volunteers receive feedback on ideas and suggestions submitted.

2.14.1 MS Society email accounts

We expect volunteers to use organisational email accounts where it is specified as part of their role and to do so in line with the guidance provided and our data protection policy.

2.14.2 Social Media

Using social media is a great way to share information and communicate with the public about work that the MS Society is doing. Any posts that a volunteer wishes to make about their volunteering should be made in line with our Social Media Policy.

2.15 **Conflict of interests**

Any conflicts of interest (for example personal or financial) which may become apparent due to volunteering with MS Society should be declared and managed immediately. We will endeavour to explore if there is any potential conflict of interest, and if that is the case, a volunteer may be required to step away from a role and/or activity. For more information, please read our Conflicts of Interest Policy.

2.16 **Volunteer expenses**

Volunteers should not be disadvantaged in any way by volunteering for the MS Society, including financially. We'll reimburse all reasonable out-of-pocket expenses incurred through carrying out volunteering activities that are in line with the MS Society Expenses Policy.

2.7 **Health and safety, and insurance**

The MS Society is committed to ensuring that volunteers have a safe environment in which to volunteer and are not exposed to unnecessary risks as well as a responsibility for the health and safety of any other attendees or service users who may be affected by our work.

Volunteers have a duty to take care of themselves and others who might be affected by their actions. They must follow the MS Society's health and safety policies and procedures, and they will be covered by the MS Society's insurance.

2.18 **Lone volunteering**

It is rare that volunteers will need to undertake their role on their own, outside of their own home. Home visits should **never** take place alone and volunteers should follow the guidance provided for any other lone volunteering.

Volunteers should never take any unnecessary risks when volunteering for us and should remove themselves from any situation they do not feel safe in.

2.19 **Confidentiality and data protection**

We have a legal responsibility to have clear expectations and standards for anyone who handles records of personal or sensitive information,

which is guided by the Data Protection Act 2018. People trust us to store and use their information properly and all our volunteers and employees are expected to follow the principles and guidance set out in our Data Protection Policy.

We will provide relevant Data Protection training and tools to volunteers who are likely to handle personal or sensitive information as part of their role.

Volunteers may come into contact with information that is confidential but not covered by UK GDPR. This is held on trust and should not be discussed outside of the MS Society or in general conversation and must not be used by MS Society volunteers for their own purposes.

2.20 **Reward and recognition**

We couldn't deliver the work of the MS Society without volunteers and are committed to ensuring that volunteers and their contributions are rewarded, recognised and valued appropriately across the organisation.

2.21 **Dealing with problems**

The MS Society is committed to ensuring that all volunteers have a positive and rewarding experience. Part of making sure that this happens is by recognising that problems can occur and ensuring that when they do, there is a fair and consistent process for resolving them.

We will always try to address any problems informally before moving to a formal resolution process.

Where a volunteer raises a concern, we will respond fairly and consistently in line with the appropriate policy.

2.21.1 Volunteer Problem Solving

The MS Society's Volunteer problem solving policy and procedure provides a framework for resolving problems involving volunteers in an open, fair and timely manner. This includes discrimination, harassment and bullying.

2.21.2 Complaints process

There may be times when problems lead volunteers to make a complaint. We will ensure that all complaints are handled consistently and fairly, in line with our complaints policy. All complaints are treated confidentially.

Where a volunteer raises a complaint about another volunteer, the Volunteering problem solving policy and procedure will be used.

2.21.3 Whistleblowing

If a volunteer has concerns about any activity related to volunteering or any activity of the MS Society that haven't been or can't be addressed through the normal complaints process, they can raise these in an anonymous way through our whistle blowing policy and process.

2.22 Taking a break or moving on

Volunteering should always suit people's lives, and we understand that circumstances can change.

2.22.1 Taking a break

We will always support a volunteer who wishes to step away from their role for an agreed period. To help us in doing this, we ask volunteers to discuss their needs with their Volunteer Manager.

2.22.2 Moving on

A volunteer can stop volunteering with us at any time and for any reason and we will support that decision and facilitate a seamless volunteer leaving process. We ask that volunteers give us notice of such a decision so that we can:

- thank the volunteer
- offer support
- plan for succession where needed
- provide reference

Equally, we may at any time, for whatever reason, ask a volunteer to step away from their role. This may be because of changes in structure or a failure to comply with the requirements of a roles, as examples. The process for deciding that someone can no longer volunteer in a particular role will be fair and transparent.

We are keen to continue learning and improving the volunteering experience so volunteers may be asked to give feedback when they leave.

3 Responsibilities

3.1 Volunteers

A volunteer's involvement may be long term or short term or even for a specific task on a particular day. Each volunteer will be provided with clear details of the task and what is expected of them. Each volunteer will have a named volunteer manager to support them.

The rights of a volunteer are to:

- know what is expected of them when acting as a volunteer and to be given appropriate training
- know where to go for advice or a problem
- be able to refuse to carry out a task
- have safe conditions in which to carry out their role
- be free from discrimination on grounds of age, sex, gender, race, sexual orientation, religion or belief, disability or any other characteristic or aspect of their identity
- be treated with respect by fellow volunteers, MS Society employees and members of the public

The responsibilities of a volunteer are to:

- agree a reasonable expectation of time given the nature of the role and inform the Volunteer Manager when that time expectation can't be met
- carry out tasks safely and reliably
- always follow the MS Society's health and safety procedures and to take responsibility for their own actions and how they impact on others
- follow relevant policies and procedures of work, and keep abreast of news shared with volunteers
- represent the MS Society in a positive and friendly manner to others, in line with our Code of Conduct
- treat all colleagues and members of the public with respect
- bring problems to the attention of the Volunteer Manager
- attend training/briefing sessions in connection with their volunteer role
- respect the confidentiality of the MS Society and others where required
- ask their Volunteer Manager for guidance if they don't fully understand their role and responsibilities

3.2 **All staff**

Involving volunteers in our work can help us to extend the impact we have. All staff should consider how they may be able to involve volunteers in a meaningful way to deliver their objectives and provide the best possible outcomes and support for people living with MS.

Where staff do include volunteers in their work, or work with them in any way, they should be committed to:

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- Attending relevant learning and development opportunities
 - always treating volunteers with respect, consideration and appreciation
 - promoting volunteer health and wellbeing, making sure they can carry out their role in a safe, supportive and inclusive environment
 - ensuring volunteers understand their responsibilities, including the length of time we would like them to be involved (where appropriate)
 - ensuring volunteers are given an adequate introduction/pre-assignment briefing before taking on the role
 - ensuring volunteers are aware of the conditions beyond our control, such as the weather and other external factors
 - giving volunteers information about the training and support available to help them carry out their role
 - being clear about any obligatory requirements for volunteers, for example, training and understanding risk assessments
 - providing volunteers with support through a named Volunteer Manager
 - offering fair, honest and timely feedback on a volunteer's work if appropriate
 - updating volunteers about how their work is making a difference
 - treating volunteers fairly, and ensuring we follow relevant volunteering procedures, policies and legislation, for example, health and safety and the Equality Act 2020
- 3.3 The Leadership Team/Heads of Department are responsible for championing Volunteering throughout their teams and ensuring that we can use Volunteering to further the aims of the Charity.
- 3.4 The Performance and Policy Manager is the policy lead and is responsible for ensuring that Volunteering policy and procedure at the MS Society follows best practice and is in line with this Volunteering Policy so that staff can feel confident in involving volunteers in their work.
- 3.5 The Head of Volunteering and Community Networks is the policy owner and is responsible for ensuring that it is complied with.
- 4 **Laws and regulations**
- 4.1 The policy complies with the relevant laws and regulations in place at the time of approval. Any changes in laws and regulations before the scheduled review process will be applied as soon as possible.

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4.2 The policy also complies with the relevant professional and sector standards and codes in force.

5 Monitoring and compliance

5.1 All the policies and procedures put in place for volunteering will support the implementation of this policy. The volunteer management framework and volunteer journey will also ensure that this is being followed and the monitoring of each of these will ensure compliance of this policy.

6 Training and support

6.1 Volunteer management training will be mandatory for any staff member or volunteer who is responsible for managing volunteers.

7 Review and maintenance

7.1 The policy will be reviewed every three years, or sooner where deemed necessary.

8 Appendices

8.1 Where necessary, policies may be supplemented, supported or complemented by other documents. The appendices should include:

Appendix 1: related documents

Appendix 2: document provenance

Appendix 3: equality impact assessment summary

You may also include where necessary

Appendix 4: privacy impact assessment summary



Appendix 1: related documents

Document title	Relationship to this policy
Equity, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy	Mentioned in this policy
Safeguarding Policy (England and Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland)	Mentioned in this policy
Data Protection Policy	Mentioned in this policy
Social Media Policy	Mentioned in this policy
Conflicts of interest policy	Mentioned in this policy
Volunteer expenses policy	Mentioned in this policy
Volunteer problem solving policy	Mentioned in this policy
Complaints policy	Mentioned in this policy
Whistleblowing policy	Mentioned in this policy

Appendix 2: document provenance

Date endorsed	Category	Summarise changes made	Reason for changes	Consulted	Changes endorsed by
[month / year]	[Scheduled review / Interim update]	[list changes made to policy]	[List the reason for the changes]	[List who was consulted]	[Job title/Board/Committee/EG]



Appendix 3: equality impact assessment

Screening question:

Does this policy or any of its processes have an impact on staff, volunteers, supporters, users of our services or activities or any other people who may come into contact with us?

YES

Equality impact assessment summary:

[Please see EIA here.](#)

Risk score is 1.

Appendix 4: privacy impact assessment

Screening question:

Does this policy relate to the gathering, processing, storing or the use of personal identifiable information of staff, volunteers, service users or donors; or gathering processing or storing commercially sensitive information (either ours or partner organisations); or altering processes or systems relating to gathering, processing or storing or use of this information?

NO

Privacy impact assessment summary:

If you answered yes to the above screening question you will need to complete a privacy impact assessment. Please contact the Head of Information Governance for support. Once completed, please include a summary of the PIA here, or 'not relevant' if one has not been completed.